



# Information Brief

## Juvenile Court School Liaisons

*Many students who are truant and have other behavior problems in school also have behavior problems at home and in the community. The school and juvenile court may be working with the same young person but too frequently do not coordinate their efforts. Juvenile Court School Liaisons provide this link. Schools and Juvenile Court Services can be more effective if they work together to provide intensive school-based supervision for at-risk and delinquent youth.*

### CRITICAL ELEMENTS ADDRESSED:

- *The school, in collaboration with the community, provides a full and accessible array of specialized programs and services to address the needs of students experiencing social, emotional and/or behavioral problems.*
- *Schools and community agencies and organizations establish working partnerships to support students and their families.*
- *A community-based comprehensive system of integrated services is linked with schools in the district.*

### WHAT ARE JUVENILE COURT SCHOOL LIAISONS?

Juvenile Court School Liaisons (JCSLs) are staff who work under cooperative arrangements between local schools and the juvenile court. They provide intensive involvement with at-risk and delinquent youth, and they promote important collaboration between schools and the juvenile court. Juvenile Court School Liaisons have the day-to-day personal relationship with youth that the school setting provides, but also can call upon the resources of the court.

Juvenile Court School Liaisons fulfill various functions, depending upon the needs of the school and community. Their duties may include:

- Working with the Juvenile Court Officer to supervise students who are on probation;
- Working with individual students who have been identified as at-risk, providing prevention services and linking them and their families with resources in the community;
- Working to reduce truancy;
- Responding to disruptive behavior in the classroom so all students can learn better; and
- Working with at-risk and delinquent students after school and during the summer to prevent delinquency during these high-risk times.

### Who do Juvenile Court School Liaisons Serve?

Juvenile Court Liaisons have limited caseloads, ideally about 25 students who are selected jointly by the school and Juvenile Court Services. These include students who are on probation to juvenile court, students who are identified as being at-risk by either the school or the court, students with truancy problems and/or disruptive school behavior, and other students, as time permits.

### How many JCSLs are there?

Approximately 160 liaisons were assigned to work in middle and high schools across Iowa during the 2000-2001 school year, an increase from approximately 70 in 1996-1997.

### How are JCSLs funded?

The Iowa Legislature makes an appropriation for school based supervision to the Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS). The IDHS transfers funds to the control of Juvenile Court Services who then negotiates contracts with local school districts. Participating school districts are required to provide at least 25 percent of the cost of their Juvenile Court School Liaison.

Juvenile Court Services and the school district provide supervision of the JCSL. The Chief Juvenile Court Officers and the Iowa Attorney General's Office sponsor an annual training conference.

### REASONS FOR GROWTH AND EFFECTIVENESS

- **Liaisons are school-based.** School is the most effective place for Juvenile Court Services to work with youth. JCSLs work with students in their every day surroundings. They get to know their schools, their neighborhoods, their friends and their families. They have the opportunity to see the student interact with peers and teachers. In addition, being on site, they are able to intervene immediately in conflicts and disruptive behavior.
- **Liaisons provide the intensity and frequency of involvement with youth** that is necessary for success. This agrees with research findings that intensive one-on-one involvement is the best and most effective way to deal with at-risk youth.
- **Liaisons help spark collaboration between schools and the court.** JCSLs are at the

intersection of these two crucial systems and they foster collaboration.

- **The liaison program is flexible and locally run.** There is flexibility within the job description for Juvenile Court School Liaisons to reflect the needs of the local school and community.
- **Liaisons help at-risk students and families connect with other community resources.** JCSLs often find creative ways to meet the needs of families, bringing together resources that otherwise might be fragmented and ineffective.
- **Liaisons help improve the school environment for all students.** *All* students learn better when schools are quieter, safer and less disrupted.

#### AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Some JCSLs work with at-risk and delinquent youth after school and during the summer. A study conducted for the U.S. Justice Department confirms the need for such work. The study tracked juvenile crime by time of day in eight states, including Iowa, and found that the prime hours for violent juvenile crime are from 3-8 p.m. In fact, 3:00 p.m. is the peak hour for all juvenile crime. According to the study, "When the school bell rings leaving millions of young people without responsible adult supervision or constructive activities, juvenile crime suddenly triples and prime time for juvenile crime begins."

Sending at-risk and delinquent youth out of the schools in the middle of the afternoon without adult supervision or constructive activities often is a recipe for bad decisions. Such youth are more likely to engage in assaults and vandalism, and they also are at much higher risk of personally destructive behaviors such as pregnancy and drug or alcohol abuse. In Iowa, some JCSLs are playing a much-needed role in after-school programs that provide structure to youth during these crucial hours.

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT IT:

- **WEB SITES:**
  - Iowa Attorney General's Office: <http://www.iowaattorneygeneral.org/>
- **IN THIS HANDBOOK:** See "Success4 Critical Elements," and other articles in this section on *Positive Behavioral Supports, Risk-Focused Prevention, Early Intervention, Mentoring, and After School Programs*.

#### RESULTS

Iowa communities have reported significant improvement by students receiving services through the Juvenile Court School Liaison program, including fewer new offenses, better school attendance and better school performance. The Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning Division of the Iowa Department of Human Rights is now collecting statewide information.

Pennsylvania has used Juvenile Court Officers much like Iowa uses JCSLs. A University of Pennsylvania study showed promising results there, including significant reductions in both new arrests and out-of-home placements for youth in their School-based Probation (SBP) program. Twenty-one percent of the School-based Probation group youth were arrested for serious new offenses, compared to 82 percent in the control group. Youth in an SBP sample had 40 percent fewer out-of-home placements and less than half the average number of days spent in out-of-home placement (35 days versus 83 days), for an estimated savings of \$6,665 for every case assigned to the program.

#### SUMMARY

Iowa's Juvenile Court School Liaisons provide intensive services to at-risk and delinquent students and an important link between schools and juvenile court. The program is locally run and school-based. It is collaborative. It combines law enforcement and prevention. It improves school safety. It embraces education. When schools, juvenile court and others all work together, good things happen; learning goes up and juvenile crime goes down.

Marilyn Lantz, Iowa Attorney General's Office, Grinnell, Iowa, wrote this Information Brief especially for this *Safe Schools Leadership Handbook*. Thank you, Marilyn, for your contribution.